

To: White House Conference on Aging Policy Committee
From: Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs
Subject: Rhode Island Events in Preparation for 2005 White House Conference on Aging

The Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs held four Aging Agenda events around the state in May and June to gather input from R.I. seniors, baby boomers, and professional representatives from the aging network about issues that they would like to see included in a platform of policy recommendations to be conveyed by Rhode Island delegates to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging in Washington in December.

Following are the dates and locations of the four events: May 16th, The Center (senior center , approximately 40 in attendance), Wakefield (southern part of the state); May 21st, Roger Williams University Conference Center (approximately 10 in attendance), Portsmouth (eastern part of the state); June 6th, Arnold Conference Center (approximately 50 in attendance), Cranston (central part of the state); and June 11th, Woonsocket Senior Center (approximately 20 in attendance), Woonsocket (northern part of the state).

Several priority issues were discussed:

Priority Issue #1:

The preference of seniors and disabled adults to remain independent in the community for as long as possible. This issue was raised at each of the four events.

Barriers:The institutional bias of the current system of long term care in R.I. and in the nation.

A lack of adequate and affordable services in the community to allow seniors and disabled adults with moderate to significant needs to remain in their homes.

Proposed Solutions:

Increased options to receive affordable support services in the home. Services would include: health care to meet medical needs ,even intensive medical needs; support services such as personal care ,meal preparation, chore services and housekeeping; funding to support home modifications for the disabled; support services for caregivers who wish to keep their loved one at home but who must continue to work and care for other family members ; transportation to allow seniors and disabled adults to remain independent and continue to be engaged with the community at large; and property tax relief to allow individuals on fixed incomes to remain in their homes.

Priority Issue #2:

Planning for Long Term Care

Barriers:Lack of information about estate planning; lack of information about options for long term care in facilities; the cost of long term care insurance.

Proposed Solutions: Increased education about estate planning; tax breaks or employer support for the purchase of long term care insurance; increased education about the financing mechanisms for long term care in residential facilities; more effective oversight and regulation of long term care facilities.

Priority Issue #3: Work Force Issues.How will the babyboomers of today find employment as they age? As longevity increases, people who are healthy will find it financially necessary and socially desirable to continue to work.

Barriers:Discrimination against older workers; the need to retrain older workers who may have to shift careers; inflexible work schedules and conditions; inadequate transportation services.

Proposed Solutions: Adequate funding to provide retraining for older workers who shift careers; acceptance and flexibility on the part of employers with regard to the hiring of older workers; increased transportation for older workers to travel to and from work; the redesign of jobs to allow flexibility in schedules to accommodate older workers.

Priority Issue #4: Accessibility of long term care services for diverse populations.

Barriers:Inadequate outreach to minority populations to educate them about programs and services available to the elderly;lack of availability of non- English speaking professionals and lack of promotional and educational materials in other languages; lack of equal access to inheritance rights for homosexual seniors who report discrimination in the area of long term care.

Proposed Solutions: Expansion of professional staff, programs, and materials to address the needs of the elderly in diverse cultures;improved training of professionals in cultural differences around aging and long term care; the adoption of policies that will ensure equal access to long term care services and benefits for all seniors regardless of sexual orientation.

Priority Issue #5: Caregivers of the elderly and disabled and their need for support and services.

Barriers:Lack of organized representation of caregivers; the stress and isolation experienced by caregivers which often prevents them from seeking help and from advocating for their family member; lack of workplace programs to support caregivers; inadequate data on caregiving relationships and on the effect of caregiving on the workforce.

Proposed solutions: Systematic collection and analysis of data to define the various caregiving relationships ;the development of programs and services to meet the unique needs of adults caring for an elder, of elders caring for an adult disabled child, of elders caring for a grandchild under the age of eighteen, and of elders caring for other elders; the development of programs in the workplace to support caregivers.